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**Near East and
South Asia Review**

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*Page***Articles****Afghanistan: The War in Balkh Province, 1978-84**

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Iran-Turkey: Weighing Tactics Toward the Kurds

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Tehran and Ankara are cooperating to curb the activities of Kurdish rebels in the rugged area where Iran, Turkey, and Iraq come together, but the two governments' efforts will not succeed.

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Some articles are preliminary views of a subject or speculative, but the contents normally will be coordinated as appropriate with other offices within CIA. Occasionally an article will represent the views of a single analyst; these items will be designated as noncoordinated views. Comments may be directed to the authors,

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Articles

**Afghanistan: The War in
Balkh Province, 1978-84**

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Military operations in Balkh Province have been concentrated in a belt approximately 30 kilometers wide that includes Mazar-e Sharif—the provincial capital—its airfields, an important east-west highway running through the center of the province, and insurgent bases in the mountains to the south. The position of the government has improved only slightly since early 1981, and Kabul controls much less territory than it did at the time of the Soviet invasion.

1978-80—Mainly Peaceful

Neither the Communist coup in 1978 nor the Soviet invasion the following year sparked strong resistance in Balkh. Mazar-e Sharif, the country's fourth-largest city, did not experience insurgent activity comparable to other Afghan cities. Mazari, for example, staged only a largely nonviolent one-day protest in February 1980, while Kabulis were engaged in more than a week of violent demonstrations. For most of 1980, security forces and insurgents clashed only infrequently in the countryside.

By December, however, incidents in the countryside were increasing, and insurgent pressure on Mazar-e Sharif became serious enough for the Soviets to stage the first of several operations designed to drive insurgents from the Marmol Valley in mountains south of the city.

Early 1981—Insurgent Gains

The resistance made significant gains in early 1981. The Afghan 18th Division, having reinforced units in Faryab Province to deal with an insurgent threat, had no combat troops to turn back an insurgent raid on

Mazar-e Sharif. By April the insurgents, with little fighting in Balkh, had eliminated the government presence in almost all of the mountainous southern half of the province.

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1981-83—Ups and Downs for Both Sides

Fighting in northern Balkh during most of the next three years was characterized by cycles of Soviet and Afghan Government sweep operations that resulted in a marked decline in resistance activity. With increasing arms holdings and improved organization, the insurgents became more active in early 1983. Efforts to improve cooperation were spearheaded by the province's most influential Jamiat commander, Zabiullah Khan, who was often able to establish working relations with the moderate-backed Harakat-i-Inqilab and the Shiite Nasr organization. Insurgent attacks concentrated on the east-west road, Mazar-e Sharif, and the airfields. The insurgents temporarily seized a district capital west of Mazar in November.

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The Balkh River valley in the mountains southwest of Mazar-e Sharif has been the only other area with significant military activity. Despite insurgent gains in the south in the winter and spring of 1981, the government maintained tenuous control of parts of the

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valley. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The government apparently relies on heavy air attacks to deter the insurgents.

[REDACTED]

- Sweep operations reduce insurgent activity for a few months at most. At least in Balkh, establishing new posts appears to have a lasting impact. There was a lasting reduction of insurgent activity in Mazar-e Sharif only after the Soviets established posts in the Marmol Valley in January 1984. The deeper penetration by a larger force in March 1983 brought only about two months' respite.

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1984—Slight Soviet Gain

The establishment in January 1984 of permanent Soviet posts in the Marmol Valley was presumably responsible for a lower level of insurgent activity during the remainder of the year. In Mazar-e Sharif, sabotage became, for the first time, more common than insurgent raids. During the summer, for the first time in nearly four years, the Soviets staged a few airstrikes against insurgent bases in the southern part of the province. [REDACTED]

- Terrain is critical in determining insurgent activity. Insurgents can do little in the flat, open northern third of the province; [REDACTED]

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Lessons

There are some obvious differences in the fighting in Balkh and in other provinces, especially those along the Pakistani border, where there has been greater military activity. Soviet involvement in Balkh has been relatively low—most air and ground operations have involved only Afghan Government forces. The resistance is more poorly armed in Balkh than in eastern Afghanistan, primarily because of Balkh's greater distance from Pakistan and Iran. Historically, the people of Balkh have not been as rebellious or warlike as those of most other provinces. [REDACTED]

The Soviets have improved their position marginally in Balkh since 1981, primarily in reducing the level of insurgency in Mazar-e Sharif. In our view, however, unless the Soviets are willing to commit substantially greater resources to the province, they will make little progress in Balkh in coming years. [REDACTED]

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Nevertheless, in our view, some aspects of the war in Balkh apply to other areas as well:

- The Soviets are willing to countenance insurgent control of remote areas and a low level of insurgent activity. In Balkh they have made no effort to gain control of the southern part of the province and have staged sweep operations only when the insurgency was active. They usually have not tried to follow up sweep operations by establishing new posts. Once the establishment of posts in the Marmol Valley reduced the insurgency in Mazar-e Sharif to an apparently tolerable level, the Soviets made no effort to block other insurgent infiltration routes or occupy other base areas.

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**Iran-Turkey: Weighing
Tactics Toward the Kurds**

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Tehran and Ankara are cooperating to curb the activities of Kurdish rebels in the rugged area where Iran, Turkey, and Iraq come together, but we do not believe that the two governments' efforts will succeed. In fact, renewed clashes in Turkey between the Kurdish Labor Party (PKK) and the Turkish army in the spring could jeopardize Tehran's fragile rapprochement with Ankara.

Kurdish Unrest in Turkey

Turkey has put on trial 84 Kurdish separatists accused of raiding gendarme posts in its remote southeastern provinces last August. The raids, in which two gendarmes were killed and several wounded, were the work of the Kurdish Labor Party. The Turkish military prosecutor charged in his indictment that the PKK is trying to start a revolt in Turkey's southeast, which is largely inhabited by Kurds.

The PKK raids took place simultaneously against two small cities 200 kilometers apart. According to diplomatic sources in Ankara, the raids were well organized, indicating sophistication on the part of the attackers. The raiders held the towns for three days and then made good their escape. Turkey's military prosecutor claims the raiders staged the attacks to achieve maximum publicity and to win converts to their cause. According to diplomatic sources in Ankara, the raiders found sympathetic audiences, and, in one town, the inhabitants rioted under instigation of the separatists.

Kurdish attacks on Turkish security forces continued after the August raids. According to press reports, more than 20 Turkish gendarmes have been killed by the separatists. In one incident three of Turkish President Evren's personal guards were ambushed. The President had visited one of the raided communities, and the guards were killed as the President's party departed the area.

Except for Turkey's major cities, the southeast is the only area in Turkey still under martial law five years after the military took control of the country. Southeastern Turkey is economically depressed, and, although the government has plans to rehabilitate the region, diplomatic sources in Ankara assert that significant progress cannot be made until the 1990s. In the meantime, according to press reports, redevelopment may have short-term adverse effects on Turkey's 10 million Kurds. Rehabilitation plans include relocating villages to construct a major dam complex.

What Is the PKK?

The PKK is a Marxist group of probably about 5,000 members. the group was founded in the late 1960s and driven from Turkey in 1980 by the military takeover. Its members fled into exile—some to Syria and Lebanon, others to Iran and Europe.

PKK cadres began infiltrating northern Iraq. Because of its war with Iran, Baghdad has withdrawn troops from its Kurdish provinces in the north, leaving stretches of the border with Turkey virtually unguarded. The PKK guerrillas were able to establish bases there.

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The first PKK raids into Turkey from Iraq took place in the spring of 1983. Turkey's response was extraordinary—Turkish troops staged cross-border raids into Iraq to clear out the guerrillas' hideouts. The raids served notice on the PKK that its havens in Iraq were not safe from Turkish reprisals.

The PKK-Barzani Alliance

In July 1983, Iran invaded northern Iraq along with several hundred Iraqi Kurdish guerrillas of the Barzani tribe. The Barzanis subsequently fought their way into the area of the PKK guerrillas.

Turkish gendarme units recrossed the border into Iraq after the PKK raids in mid-August 1984. This time, however, they confronted the combined force of the Barzanis and the PKK. The Kurds apparently fought skillfully and, taking advantage of the mountainous terrain, eluded the Turkish dragnet, according to diplomatic sources in Ankara.

Turkey's incursions into Iraq in mid-August provoked a hostile reaction from Iran, which accused Ankara of helping Saddam Husayn's regime. Iran's Foreign Ministry warned Ankara that further incursions would increase tensions and endanger the security of the region. The presence of the rebel Kurds in northern Iraq benefits Tehran, as the guerrillas tie down Iraqi troops that would otherwise be fighting the Iranians.

Turkey attempted to mollify Iran, arguing that the proximity of the guerrillas to the volatile border area could not be tolerated.

Tehran Pacifies the Turks

Tehran apparently has thought better of antagonizing the Turks, through whose territory it receives vital war materiel and commercial goods from Europe.

Tehran concluded lucrative economic agreements with Ankara. The Iranians agreed to consider building oil and gas pipelines through Turkey; Iran also contracted to increase its imports from Turkey. Iran probably hopes these economic incentives will prevent the Turks from siding with Iraq in the war.

Outlook

We believe the PKK attacks on Turkish security posts will resume in the spring.

Turkey's army appears determined to crush the rebels even at the risk of antagonizing Tehran. It will almost certainly move into Iraq and Iran once the snows melt and the military's ability to move improves. When this happens, we believe the fragile rapprochement between Tehran and Ankara will collapse.

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